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Thursday, 19 October 2006, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Oshima	(Japan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Brencick

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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06-57842 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bahrain, Cuba, Finland and Israel, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 17 October 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/827 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Thursday, 19 October 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. De Soto to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I give Mr. De Soto the floor.

Mr. De Soto: Today in the Middle East, crisis and opportunity exist side by side in a daily struggle for dominance over the fate of Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and the region as a whole.

At the heart of the conflict is the problem of Israel and Palestine. In that theatre, a deadly crisis continues in Gaza. For many months, Israel has conducted military operations, featuring tank, commando and infantry incursions, targeted killings from the air and firing from the sea, with the stated purpose of preventing the daily Palestinian militant rocket fire into population centres in southern Israel. These operations intensified after the capture of an Israeli soldier on 25 June and the killing of two others by Palestinian militants who had crossed from Gaza into Israel.

Since that time, Israeli operations have killed 295 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have injured 1,113 others. However, neither these intensive operations nor continuing diplomatic efforts have led either to the release of the captured soldier or to the cessation of the indiscriminate rocket attacks, which have injured 20 Israelis since 25 June.

A number of Israeli sources in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and intelligence services claim that weapons-smuggling into Gaza has increased in recent months, including through tunnels under the

Philadelphi corridor and elsewhere. IDF forces launched a ground operation along the corridor in recent days, and there are reports that the IDF is preparing for a further intensification of its military operations in Gaza.

Egyptian officials are leading diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis and report that a package is on the table designed to address both parties' concerns, but the captors say they seek additional guarantees. In Cairo last week, I conveyed the full support of the United Nations for the Egyptian efforts and expressed our readiness to assist in any way we can.

The other crisis that must be overcome is the political crisis of the Palestinian Authority, which has for several months been governed by a President and a Prime Minister with divergent programmes and has been polarized by deadly clashes between rival security forces. Palestinian society is teetering between national unity one day and civil conflict the next.

On 11 September, President Abbas announced that he had agreed with Prime Minister Haniyeh on the political platform of a national unity government. On 20 September, the Quartet encouraged those efforts in the hope that a national unity government programme would reflect Quartet principles and allow for early international engagement.

Regrettably, following statements from Prime Minister Haniyeh calling basic points into question, these efforts did not succeed. Recent efforts by regional mediators to help the Palestinians unite have also not borne fruit. In our contacts with both the presidency and the Government, we continue to urge them and the movements of which they are members to make a new effort to overcome their differences.

We saw how important it is for these efforts to succeed two and a half weeks ago, when at least eight Palestinians were killed and more than 70 were injured in armed clashes in Gaza between the striking Palestinian security forces, largely loyal to Fatah, and the executive force deployed by the Hamas Minister of the Interior. United Nations workers on the ground also report an increased reliance on traditional law enforcement as family groupings resort to self-protection and take justice into their own hands. The members of the civil police — the only civilian service with the potential to provide public order and protection within the occupied Palestinian territories' increasingly insecure communities — have received less than 40 per cent of their salaries since March, and only half of them now show up for work. A rolling strike has, in fact, been widespread throughout the public sector since 13 August. As many as three quarters of medical workers are not turning up at work, and WHO reports that most hospital wards are, in fact, closed. In response, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has had to open its medical facilities to non-refuges. Ninety per cent of teachers employed by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank are on strike, imperilling this year's academic cycle. Here again, UNRWA has been obliged to step in. There are growing indications that ministries are being transformed by the continued replacement of mid- to high-level officials with new appointees loyal to the current Government — a process that may also be accelerated by the departure of former officials in the absence of regular salary payments.

We welcome the efforts of the European Commission to mitigate the worse effects of the crisis by renewing and expanding the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM), as agreed by the Quartet last month. However, the TIM can neither substitute for the Palestinian Authority, nor can it be sustained financially over time. The continued withholding by Israel of over half a billion dollars of Palestinian money, collected via value-added tax and customs receipts, is the biggest single direct cause of the Palestinian financial crisis. Its importance has led the Quartet to invite the parties to consider channelling these funds through the TIM, at least for the present.

Another ingredient for restoring hope to the Palestinians would be implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, which was concluded a year ago next month. The Quartet believes that Rafah and other crossings must remain open in accordance with the Agreement. Despite discussions by Quartet members with the Israeli authorities on concrete steps to move forward — including proposals put forward by the United Nations — Israel's policy of near-complete closure of Gaza continues. Israel has legitimate security concerns relating to human and commercial movements in and out of the Gaza Strip, and we continue to press the Palestinian Authority to meet its obligations under the Agreement on Movement and Access relating to the protection and administration of passages. For its part, Israel has undertaken in the Agreement to ensure the continuous

operation of passages and to facilitate the export of agricultural goods from Gaza. While specific security threats may require specific actions, analysis of Agreement implementation patterns shows that the significant tightening of closures at Rafah, Karni and Erez crossings have been heavily shaped by two events in 2006: the formation of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government and the abduction of the Israeli soldier. It would appear that only by decoupling economic access for civilians from the broader political impasse will the Agreement on Movement and Access be implemented. Only then will Palestinian economic life be given a chance to recover.

Meanwhile, obstacles to movement in the West Bank have risen by 40 per cent in a year. Settlement activity continues, with the recent announcement of the construction of a further 950 settlement units in the West Bank. The construction of the main structure of the police station on the E1 block between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim has largely been completed. The construction of the barrier on occupied territory, including around Jerusalem, has continued, in defiance of the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion.

Access to the occupied Palestinian territory by Palestinians of the diaspora has also been tightened in recent months. Palestinians holding foreign passports, including businessmen, students and professionals, have, in ever-larger numbers, been denied visas that would permit them to visit spouses or families or tend to businesses. I should also report that Prime Minister Olmert announced in the aftermath of the Lebanon war that the plans on which he had been elected, namely, to withdraw Israeli settlements from parts of the West Bank, are on hold. The Prime Minister has, however, stated his willingness to meet President Abbas, and aides to the two leaders are exploring this possibility. Foreign Minister Livni and President Abbas also met during last month's opening of the general debate of the General Assembly.

The fragile balance between crisis and opportunity is also apparent in Lebanon, where momentum has been generated in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), but also where the country's heavy political tensions remain a constant source of concern. The United Nations is continuing to work closely with all sides to encourage political leaders to commit themselves to dialogue in order to bridge their differences. The Council will receive the report on implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) shortly. The Secretariat will also continue to report to the Council directly on the status of implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and I will, therefore, not address this further in this briefing.

I should report also that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert has called for direct talks between Israel and Lebanon, but Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora has reiterated his position that his country will the last to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Meanwhile, Syrian President Assad has expressed publicly on more than one occasion a desire to negotiate with Israel in order to secure the return of the occupied Golan Heights and establish a lasting peace between Syria and Israel. While this has generated some debate in Israel, the Israeli Prime Minister has dismissed these statements and has stated that Syria must cease alleged support for terrorism. Mr. Olmert has also stated that, as long as he is Prime Minister, the Golan Heights will remain a permanent part of the State of Israel.

The continuing violence in Gaza and southern Israel continues to kill, injure and endanger civilians. Palestinian militant rocket fire should cease, as should Israeli military operations. Both sides should comply with their obligations to respect civilians under international humanitarian law. The virtual siege of Gaza is having a devastating effect on the lives of ordinary Palestinians, stifling hope and fomenting despair, while the continued dangerous launching of rockets at Israeli population centres, such as Sderot, is a source of deep distress for ordinary Israelis. Palestinian institutions continue to be degraded, and the suffering of civilians widens and increases, particularly in Gaza. The combination of near total closure of the Gaza Strip, non-payment of public-sector salaries, absence of basic law and order, declining service delivery, continued military strikes by air and land and the lack of any apparent political horizon is a truly explosive one — as potentially dangerous for Israel as it is currently dangerous for Palestinians. As my colleague Jan Egeland puts it, Gaza is a ticking time bomb, and only a political way out can defuse it. The United Nations fully recognizes the challenges facing both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in this regard. At the same time, we believe that they and their citizens have a shared interest in meaningful dialogue, and we offer them our full support in trying to develop it.

The difficulties that continue to bedevil efforts to form a Palestinian national unity government should

not lead us to think that there is another simple, magic formula or quick fix that is likely to solve the current Palestinian political crisis. The route of national unity offers the most credible opportunity — indeed, perhaps the only one — to stem the slide into anarchy and for the security forces controlled by the presidency and those under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior to work together to provide basic law and order for Palestinians and prevent attacks against Israel, rather than continue to face off on the streets. Such a government will need international support if it is to respond to the aspirations of the Palestinian people for law and order and progress towards a two-State solution. That is why its platform should reflect Quartet principles and why donors, in turn, should signal their readiness to re-engage if there is genuine movement, in full awareness that such movement is more likely to be a process than an event.

The international community should also expect all members of the Israeli Government, and its acts of legislation, to reflect their commitment to the principles of the peace process, including the goal of a two-State solution which ends the occupation that began in 1967, and to meeting their obligation not to advocate or pursue policies that create irreversible facts on the ground or prejudge final status issues. Israel clearly has more to do in this regard, in the light of the continued building of the barrier, the entrenchment of settlements and the rarely impeded mushrooming outposts considered illegal by Israel itself, despite its statements of intent regarding commitment to Road Map obligations.

Last month, at its meeting in New York, the Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to the Road Map as the means to realize the goal of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Quartet also stressed the need for a credible political process in order to make progress towards a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United Nations continues to work closely with Quartet partners to identify ways to restart such a political process between Israelis and Palestinians.

The international community's long-term goal is, of course, not only peace between Israel and Palestine, but also peace between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon. Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) stresses the need for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. My regional terms of reference reflect the United Nations commitment to this goal. The Arab Peace Initiative, which was endorsed by the Council of the League of Arab States in Beirut in 2002, also represents a crucial piece of the regional puzzle. A serious and systematic search for peace in the region requires dialogue with all the parties in the conflict, pari passu, to ensure that crises are managed and opportunities explored, and that developments on one track are not undermined by developments on another.

Recent developments have also driven home the interconnectedness of the region's problems and the shortcomings of piecemeal or compartmentalized approaches as opposed to an approach that is coordinated and comprehensive. Signs of willingness by Israel to open discussions with the Government of Lebanon, and by the Syrian President to talk to Israel — tentative as these are — should be considered in this light, and we hope that opportunities for adversaries talking to resolve differences will not remain unexplored.

Together with our Quartet colleagues and working with the parties and our regional partners, the United Nations will do its part in trying to rebuild this bridge in the form of a carefully monitored and credible political process based on parallel implementation of obligations leading towards a clearly defined comprehensive peace. The objectives of the United Nations remain security and full recognition to the State of Israel within internationally recognized borders, an end to the occupation for the Palestinian people in an independent, sovereign State, recovery of lost land by Syria, and a fully sovereign and secure Lebanon, through the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The President: I thank Mr. De Soto for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like first to extend our thanks to you, Mr. President, for convening this important periodic meeting which keeps Council members abreast of new developments in the Middle East. I wish also to thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his presentation to the Council and for the attention he accords to this question. My delegation endorses the

statement to be made later by the representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

We in the State of Qatar believe that a comprehensive and permanent settlement is within reach, but that it can come about only through dialogue. That is why we were in the forefront of those who called for an open ministerial -level meeting of the Council last month to revive the peace process. It behoves the Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to continue providing the necessary momentum to the peace process. The international community, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council and the members of the Quartet, should take concrete and tangible steps to renew the stagnant peace process in the Middle East on all tracks, in accordance with prior agreements, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the peace process and the Road Map.

We would like to emphasize the following points. First, any unilateral settlement runs counter to the terms of reference and the principles of the peace process and cannot constitute a comprehensive and permanent settlement. Secondly, repressive practices and illegal policies, such as building or expanding settlements, the separation wall and isolating Palestinian villages and cities from each other, hamper the peace efforts and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis which the Palestinian people is enduring in the occupied territories. Thirdly, the Security Council has repeatedly called for the establishment of a viable, democratic and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. Hence, the Security Council and the international community, particularly the sponsors of the peace process and the Quartet, should exert more strenuous efforts to resume the peace process, in accordance with agreed bases and relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and other legal mandates.

Here, I would like to cite the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of my country in his statement before the Council on 21 September 2006, in which he said,

> "The problem at hand does not need a magic solution and neither side can, in my opinion, come up with an innovative solution because the solution is known to all and sundry. It is the principle of land for peace, which is based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, which President George Bush referred to in his address to the General Assembly" (*S/PV.5530, p. 7*).

While we urge the parties concerned to shoulder their responsibilities and return to the negotiating table, the State of Qatar would also call on the Israeli Government to take the peace process seriously and to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 line. Given that the main reason for the conflict is Israel's continuing illegitimate occupation of Palestinian territories, that is something Israel must do if we are to achieve just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom would like to align itself with the statement to be delivered later by the Ambassador of Finland on behalf of the European Union. I would like to thank Mr. De Soto for his briefing.

The United Kingdom is profoundly concerned by the situation in Gaza. We are concerned that the recent increasing intra-Palestinian violence and the continuing Israeli military action both have resulted in a number of Palestinian fatalities, in both Gaza and the West Bank. The United Kingdom extends its deepest sympathies to the families that have suffered losses. We are also, of course, concerned about the continuing rocket attacks on Israeli civilian targets. At the heart of the problem is the need for Palestinians of all factions and allegiances to refrain from violence and to work together to restore calm.

It is easy to be despondent at the apparent lack of progress and at the difficulties that we confront. The political perspectives are gloomy and difficult. Yet at the Security Council meeting in September, there was seriousness and determination to make progress on the Middle East peace process, a consensus on the way forward. The events of this summer underlined why, without solving the fundamental issues, we would face continuing risks of conflict that would affect the stability and prosperity of the region and, indeed, more widely. We must therefore build upon the spirit in the Chamber in September, including by looking forward to the action points agreed by the Quartet at its ministerial meeting here that month, by building on the Quartet's relations with parties working in the region and, essentially, by revitalizing the work of the Quartet.

The United Kingdom sees two basic conditions for progress. The first is the immediate release of Corporal Shalit, the second is progress on the political track, which requires a valid partner with whom we can work. On the Palestinian side, there must be someone who has the confidence of the international community and of Israel. We believe President Abbas is that partner for peace. An early meeting between him and Prime Minister Olmert is a vital first step.

But President Abbas and the Palestinian people face tough choices in the days ahead about their Government and about its relations with Israel and the international community. But we should be clear that it is Hamas that has the responsibility for the failure so far to establish a national unity government. As the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General has pointed out, it was Prime Minister Haniyeh who brought negotiations to an end. We should be clear about what the international community is asking. A Palestinian Government based on the Quartet's three principles is one we could support, and with which we could work towards peace.

But meanwhile, as long as Hamas acts against the wishes of the majority of Palestinians, refuses to accept a two-State solution, refuses to recognize Israel and refuses to renounce violence, then the international community — and I now speak for the United Kingdom and our partners — will have to continue to channel assistance to the Palestinian people through the temporary international mechanism, which the Quartet recently agreed to extend.

Bilaterally, the United Kingdom is working with others on plans to improve security at the Karni crossing, to enable Palestinians to export their harvest. We are also working separately on plans to help build the institutions basic to a viable Palestinian State — plans that we hope to put into effect as soon as we have a Government with which we can work.

The conflict between Hizbollah and Israel that began on 12 July was brought to an end on 14 August, after members of the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1701 (2006). It is now over two months since the fighting ended. The situation in Lebanon has improved significantly. The cessation of hostilities continues to hold. The reconstruction effort is now under way. Israeli forces have largely withdrawn, and the Lebanese armed forces have deployed throughout Lebanon for the first time in many years, including along the Blue Line. It has done so with the support of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), operating under an enhanced mandate. In that connection, the Lebanese armed forces, the United Nations and those countries contributing to UNIFIL are to be commended for the determination they have shown in taking forward the will of the international community, and doing so speedily.

For our part, the United Kingdom remains committed to the full and speediest possible implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). We continue to work with the United Nations and international partners to ensure that Prime Minister Siniora and the Government of Lebanon have our full support in their efforts to secure and maintain Lebanon's sovereignty and prosperity.

But we are concerned by the role that Syria and Iran have played in financing and arming groups in Lebanon. We have repeatedly called upon them to stop their support for Hizbollah and to end their interference in Lebanese internal affairs, in accordance with resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). Both of those countries, if they chose to do so, could play a constructive role in furthering the aims of peace in the Middle East. But while they continue to support and encourage extremism, they only threaten the stability of the region and put peace in the Middle East further out of reach. We continue to urge all countries to implement the Security Council's requirements and to provide firm support to the Government of Lebanon in meeting the challenges ahead.

We have made remarkable progress on the ground in Lebanon in recent weeks, but let us all be very clear: All of that progress will be at risk if those who do not share our objectives of a stable, independent and prosperous Lebanon succeed in destabilizing its legitimate Government. That is what we have to guard against.

In conclusion, despite the difficulties, there are signs of progress. It seems to me that what is clear to the Council is that we have to keep the faith in recognizing the vital need to continue to address this issue, make progress and take every opportunity that we can find — all of us — to continue to work for the comprehensive peace and understanding that have been set out so many times in resolutions by the Council.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Let me start by thanking the Special Coordinator, Mr. De Soto, for his briefing to us

today. Let me also say that Denmark fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. Allow me to make the following remarks.

When our ministers met in this Chamber a month ago to discuss the situation in the Middle East, they were all deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation. In that regard, we regret the continuous loss of civilian life, but the ministers also expressed hope that, with concerted efforts, the peace process could be restarted. They agreed that it was essential to seek to overcome the growing sense of desperation through credible prospects for a better future for the people of the Middle East, and they reconfirmed that a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict should have at its core a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The challenge for the parties to the conflict, as well as for the international community, is to ensure that we embark on a process leading towards lasting peace in the Middle East. The framework is already in place through the Arab peace initiative, the performance-based road map for a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions, all based on the principle of land for peace. We welcome the Quartet's intentions to reinforce its activities, and we hope that the Quartet will soon succeed in that endeavour.

It is now, as it has been so often before, up to the parties to avail themselves of this window of opportunity. We have continuously stressed the necessity of an early resumption of dialogue between the two parties with a view to relaunching negotiations on the basis of the road map.

We have continuously expressed support for President Abbas. We encourage his efforts to promote national unity and the formation of a Government with a political platform reflecting the Quartet principles. Such a Government is crucial for the governing of the Palestinian territories. Moreover, such a Government is essential if the international community is to have a viable Palestinian partner in the efforts to support the relaunching of the peace process and to strengthen the capacities of the Palestinian institutions. The internal strife between Palestinian factions only hampers such efforts and is not serving the interests of the Palestinian people. We therefore call on all factions to bring an end to their internal strife. We also encourage regional partners to do their utmost to support efforts to restart the peace process.

The humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories remains of serious concern. There is an urgent need to foster positive developments in the Palestinian economy. It is urgent that the Agreement on Movement and Access be implemented fully and that the Palestinian tax and customs revenue, currently withheld by Israel, be released. Those revenues could be channelled through the temporary international mechanism, which has proved its capacity to target aide directly to the Palestinian people.

However, to be successful, such steps must be accompanied by the immediate release of the captured Israeli soldier. The Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody must also be freed immediately, and there must be an end to violence. Palestinian factions must immediately stop their attacks, just as all Israeli military activities in the Palestinian territories must cease.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the importance of making the best use of the current opportunity to restart the peace process. The parties must take the lead; the neighbours, including Syria, must constructively play along; and the international community must do what it can to provide the necessary incentives.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks you, Sir, for having organized this debate on the situation in the Middle East, nearly two months after the end of the hostilities in Lebanon.

We offer special thanks to Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for the information he has provided to the Council.

Today's meeting gives us an opportunity to take stock of the evolving situation following the important and stately ministerial debate held here a month ago on the same issue. With respect to the question of Palestine, my delegation reaffirms the critical necessity of resuming talks with a view to opening direct negotiations between the principal parties to the crisis. The current deadlock can only strengthen extremist

positions and foment violence in a region that has been prone to instability for decades.

Unfortunately, the situation is characterized by a factor that has become routine — the incessant incursions of the Israeli army into Gaza and the West Bank, particularly in heavily populated areas. That is of great concern insofar as such armed actions have serious consequences for the lives of civilians. Similarly, the extremely difficult humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, created by restrictions of all kinds imposed both by the international community — which refuses to assist the Palestinian authorities — and by the Israeli Government — which is withholding revenue from customs duties owed to the Palestinian Government — is an intolerable tragedy.

On the other side, the ongoing launching of Qassam missiles into Israel from Palestinian territories is a source of serious concern to us.

As we said recently, the Council must clearly indicate to the parties that there is no solution based on the use of force. The only valid option — a political and diplomatic settlement — must now be vigorously revived. The role of the Middle East Quartet remains essential in that respect, and the Security Council should see to it.

The acceptance of conditions set by the Quartet relating to the Hamas Government's renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel, and adherence to agreements previously concluded must be reaffirmed. To that end, the creation of a Government of national unity in Palestine could help to mitigate certain difficulties linked to the recognition of Israel and thereby avert inter-Palestinian clashes, which are not the least of the paradoxes of the current situation. My delegation strongly encourages the Palestinian protagonists to embark on a process leading to internal political consensus, and welcomes the tireless efforts of States to promote that goal.

Confidence-building measures should be undertaken forthwith. In that respect, Corporal Shalit should be released without delay. Similarly, Israel should give positive consideration to the release of Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel, particularly the ministers and parliamentarians arrested following the latest crisis. Israel should also show great restraint in its military activities in Gaza and the West Bank, and help to alleviate the Palestinian humanitarian crisis by releasing Palestinian assets generated by customs duties and taxes levied on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

The situation in Lebanon took a positive turn with the cessation of hostilities following the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). That can be seen in the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, the deployment of Lebanese forces, the deployment of a strengthened United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, and the courageous onset of reconstruction in Lebanon.

However, the implementation of that resolution is a matter for serious concern, because of breaches observed on the ground and constant violations of Lebanese airspace by Israeli aircraft. We urge the parties to the crisis to display the greatest level of restraint and not to succumb to provocations, which would undermine the search for a lasting ceasefire.

We also call on the various Lebanese parties to reach consensus solutions to unresolved problems, such as the disarmament of Hizbollah. The question of the establishment of diplomatic relations and of the demarcation of borders with Syria must be resolved by Lebanon and Syria in a sovereign fashion.

My delegation appreciates Syria's good cooperation in the investigation to determine responsibility for the repugnant criminal act that led to the deaths of former Prime Minister Hariri and 22 other people. We also welcome the progress achieved by the International Independent Investigation Commission created by resolution 1595 (2005).

In conclusion, my delegation reaffirms the need for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East crisis, with the assistance of the international community and the involvement of the States of the region. Mechanisms exist for this and are well known: we need to implement the Road Map, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Brencick (United States): I too thank Special Coordinator De Soto for his briefing this morning.

The United States remains committed to two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Road Map and the principles contained therein remain the only agreed international basis on which to move forward towards that goal.

The United States is committed to a diplomatic effort to engage moderate leaders, to help the Palestinians strengthen and reform their security sector and to support Israeli and Palestinian leaders in their efforts to come together and resolve differences. United States and other diplomatic efforts have helped the Israeli Government and President Abbas make progress on some important immediate issues, including implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and improving the situation on the ground in order to rebuild confidence between the two parties.

To continue progress on the Road Map requires a valid and responsible Palestinian partner. The Palestinian Authority Government must recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept previous agreements. We echo the call for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit.

The Quartet has welcomed efforts by Palestinian Authority President Abbas to form a Government committed to Quartet principles. The United States stands ready to renew engagement with and assistance to a Palestinian Authority committed to peace.

We remain mindful of the economic and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. The United States continues to work with the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority President Abbas to help meet critical humanitarian needs in the West Bank and Gaza, where humanitarian conditions have deteriorated, largely as a result of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government's refusal to govern responsibly. The United States remains committed to assisting the Palestinian people and has committed $468 million in direct assistance to those people, including more than $275 million in humanitarian aid.

Following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) in August, the international community has had an opportunity to support the people of Lebanon and the people of Israel in building a new foundation for a stable, sustainable and comprehensive peace. The United States will continue to work vigorously with all parties to promote full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and to support the democratically elected Government of Lebanon in asserting its sovereignty and upholding its responsibility to secure its borders. In this context, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of the two Israel Defense Forces soldiers kidnapped on 12 July.

The deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces to south Lebanon for the first time in almost 40 years demonstrates Lebanon's commitment to uphold the principles of resolution 1701 (2006). The rapid deployment of an expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to Lebanon has already helped Lebanon begin to secure its own borders, facilitate the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and allow the legitimate armed forces of the democratically elected Government of Lebanon to operate throughout their territory.

Resolution 1701 (2006) included a legal obligation for all States to prevent the sale or supply of arms and arms materiel into Lebanon, except when explicitly authorized by that Government or by UNIFIL. The international community, Syria and Iran in particular, must fulfil their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) by enforcing the embargo on illicit arms shipments.

The international community and the countries in the region continue to face significant and serious challenges in moving towards the ultimate goal of a stable, secure and prosperous Middle East. But these challenges are not insurmountable. The path towards that goal remains clear: a renewed commitment to the Road Map, acceptance of Quartet principles and full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Peru. On behalf of the Security Council, I extend a warm welcome to Ambassador Jorge Voto-Bernales, who is participating in this meeting for the first time in his capacity as Permanent Representative of Peru.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for those very cordial words of welcome. I would also like to thank Ambassador Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his briefing.

The report we have just heard is cause for great concern. In particular, we note that the crisis continues between the presidency and the Government of the

Palestinian Authority, and that an Israeli soldier remains captive. The persistence of this crisis makes it difficult for the parties to return to the path of a peaceful solution, as described in the Road Map defined by the Quartet and supported by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003); that is necessary to restore hope.

The recent war in Lebanon has taught us a lesson regarding the risk of escalated conflict. The persistence of the internal crisis in Palestinian governance is particularly alarming. The continuing disagreements between the presidency and the Government represent a major factor in the financial, economic and humanitarian crisis that gives rise to suffering among the Palestinian people, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The lack of cohesion between the presidency and the executive branch makes it very difficult to establish public order and makes it far harder for the security forces to stop the unacceptable attacks from Gaza against Israeli targets, which are often chosen indiscriminately.

For that reason, we hope that the efforts of President Abbas to form a government will continue, enabling the Palestinian Authority to act coherently. These efforts received the support of the Quartet last month in the hope that they would lead to a political platform, enabling the donor community to feel able to resume support for the Palestinian Government.

Likewise, we have taken note of the Quartet's decision, announced in its statement of 20 September, to intensify its efforts, working closely with the countries of the region with which it has established special links, and with the parties to the conflict. We need to create a dynamic that will encourage the parties to pursue their efforts towards a solution based on the principle of the peaceful coexistence of two States: Israel and Palestine. This continues to be key in clearing the path of negotiations.

With Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories and the creation of faits accomplis on the ground, and with continued acts of terrorism against Israel, the passage of time is eroding the only platform on the basis of which a lasting solution can be reached; such a solution must be achieved in the framework of Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

With regard to the situation in Lebanon, I would like to stress the need for the parties to continue to respect the cessation of hostilities and the Blue Line. The demarcation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in zones where there is controversy, remains unresolved, as does the establishment and normalization of conventional diplomatic relations between Lebanon and its neighbours. We encourage the parties to implement soon the bilateral political dialogue at the highest level.

Moreover, the existence of armed groups, which threaten the State monopoly on the legitimate use of force in Lebanese territory, cannot be accepted. They are sources of internal and external instability. I understand that we will shortly be receiving reports from the Secretariat on resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006); after we have heard those reports, we will come back with our detailed comments.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): In taking the floor after Ambassador Voto-Bernales, I too would like to say how pleased we are to welcome him to the Council.

I associate myself with the statement that will be made soon by the Ambassador of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

I thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his statement, and I also welcome the work he is doing under difficult circumstances in Jerusalem, in the Palestinian territories and in Israel as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

One month after the hope born of the meetings held in New York, and right here, within our Council, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, unfortunately, has worsened. France remains extremely concerned by the continuing deterioration in the security and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, and also by the lack of any progress in the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

The continuing firing of home-made rockets from Gaza into Israeli territory and the continued intensification of Israeli military operations since the start of the summer, which have led to many civilian victims and have caused considerable material damage, are sources of profound concern for us. The recent inter-Palestinian clashes, particularly between the security forces in Gaza, are also very worrying. This volatile situation requires a strong and swift reaction from the international community and the parties to

avoid additional deterioration, which would lead to further destabilization of the region.

We cannot remain inactive, particularly given the disastrous economic situation in the Palestinian territories. France welcomes the re-starting of the temporary international mechanism, which makes it possible to channel assistance directly to the Palestinian people. However, this mechanism, although necessary, is not sufficient. Again, we call upon Israel to transfer taxes due to the Palestinian Authority. Full implementation of the agreement on access and movement, particularly through re-opening the crossing points to the Gaza Strip, is essential to the resumption of Palestinian economic activity.

In the political sphere, the international community, above all, the Quartet, must be involved in solving this conflict, which remains a major source of instability and frustration in the region. In this respect, the latest communiqué of the Quartet opened up prospects that we hope will become reality. We hope that the Quartet will get down to preparing for an international conference to relaunch the peace process. The role of the countries in the region remains crucial, as was shown by the welcome initiative of the League of Arab States in September to reactivate the 2002 Beirut Summit peace plan.

Of course, the action of the international community cannot be a substitute for determined action by the parties themselves, who must demonstrate responsibility, take up again the path of negotiation and respect their obligations.

We call upon the Palestinian Authority to adopt the necessary measures to stop the rocket firing and the acts of terrorism and violence against Israel and to encourage the immediate release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier. We expect the Hamas-led Government to respect the three principles set out by the Quartet: renounce violence, recognize Israel and accept previous agreements.

We also want the Palestinian Authority to ensure public order and put an end to the serious internal confrontations that we have seen. We renew our support for President Abbas and fully support his efforts to strengthen the Palestinian national consensus around the objectives that he has defended since he was elected to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority. The formation of a national unity government on a platform that reflects the principles of the Quartet would be positive, both for the Palestinians and for the peace process.

In the same way, France expects Israel to stop its disproportionate military operations against Palestinian cities and refugee camps and abstain from any unilateral measure that could weaken the Palestinian Authority as an institution and as a partner in negotiation. We condemn the repeated arrests of elected Palestinians, and once again we call upon Israel to free the members of the Government and Legislative Council and politicians that they have illegally imprisoned.

Lastly, the settlements and the continuing construction of the separation wall inside the occupied Palestinian territory violate the geographic, economic and political viability of the future Palestinian State and must be stopped. The settlements in and around East Jerusalem, in particular in the so-called E-1 Area, are also a source of a great deal of concern for us, because they risk separating East Jerusalem from its Palestinian environment, cutting up the West Bank into two parts and compromising the chances for the peace process.

With regard to the situation in Lebanon, France is happy to see that the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) is progressing. The cessation of hostilities is being respected more than two months after it was concluded. The Israeli army has withdrawn from south Lebanon, with the exception of the northern part of Ghajar. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese army are continuing their deployment and strengthening in the south of the country, including along the Blue Line.

The international community should continue to work towards the objectives that are laid out in the resolution: a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, which will include the unconditional freeing of the Israeli prisoners and the solving of the sensitive issue of Lebanese detainees in Israel, the implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), the solving of the Sheba'a Farms question, respect for the embargo on arms not authorized by the Government of Lebanon or by UNIFIL, and the cessation of Israeli overflights.

France will continue its efforts and its contacts with all parties concerned to strengthen the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon. It will also continue its efforts to

help in the reconstruction of Lebanon and will host a conference on this subject in Paris next January.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm our conviction that the conflict in the region will not be solved by force, but by negotiation and political solutions. With regard to the crises for which a lasting solution is essential for the future of the Middle East and beyond, diplomatic efforts must be intensified by the Secretary-General, the Quartet and other countries directly involved. France, with its European partners, will continue to work for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Coordinator, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, for his active work in the structure of the Quartet of Middle East moderators and also for the briefing he gave us today on the situation in the region. His analysis of events matches the Russian view as to how the situation in the Middle East is developing. Of course, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to be a determining factor for the fate of the region. The lack of a settlement for that conflict is a contributing factor to the periodic worsening of the situation in the Middle East.

Russia believes that a political solution to the problem between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority does exist. The programme of action to that end is well known, namely, the road map, which was adopted by both parties to the conflict. The main role here, as was rightly stressed by Mr. De Soto, should be played by the Quartet of international mediators. Russian contacts in the region show that the leadership of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority do not question the significance of the road map and the Quartet as a mechanism for collective external influence towards a settlement of the situation in the Middle East. Another matter is how to enhance the effectiveness and functionality of such machinery. In that respect, it is important to implement the decision of the Quartet taken at the September 2006 meeting in New York. We also need to bring the road map into accordance with the current reality of the region.

Members of the Quartet could discuss those issues during the next meeting, which is now at a planning stage. In practical terms, we feel it would be timely and useful to support the authority of the Quartet, which is preparing for a meeting between President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. That could give a positive impetus to the entire range of Palestinian-Israeli relations. Unfortunately, there has been no progress on the question of creating a Government of National Unity in the Palestinian territory.

Talks on that issue between President Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh have reached a dead end. At the same time, the situation in the territory may be going out of control owing to the factional clashes there. The humanitarian situation there is still critical. We feel, therefore, that the international community — in particular, the Arab States — should help the Palestinians to find a consensus agreement. Of course, we must find a solution as soon as possible to the problem of the release of Israeli Corporal Shalit. We cannot solve the Palestinian problem separately in a bilateral framework, without dealing with the linkages with other regional crises. Therefore, we must revive the Israeli-Syrian dialogue and the very much-needed political dialogue between Damascus and Beirut. In addition, there must also be meetings between Prime Minister Siniora and President Al-Assad.

We understand that Syria is ready for such contacts, and we hope to also find such a constructive attitude in Beirut. If we examine the Lebanese situation we can feel that events are progressing in the right direction. In particular, we are satisfied that the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) is continuing, although the situation in Lebanon remains fragile. The full implementation of all of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) must proceed in such a way as to ensure that further tensions do not arise among the various political forces and confessional groups of the country.

We continue to support contacts with the Lebanese parties and encourage them to consolidate their platform for the post-war recovery of their country. It is essential to recall the inadmissibility of the Israeli practice of violating the air space of Lebanon. In addition, we are concerned by the humanitarian situation in Lebanon. Russia is helping to alleviate that situation by sending engineers to Lebanon, who will work for the next two months to restore highways, rebuild bridges and demine work sites. Russian soldiers are working in Lebanon on the

basis of bilateral agreements with the Lebanese Government and in accordance with the appeal for assistance for Lebanon contained in resolution 1701.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I would like to express my appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this meeting, and to Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his update on the situation in the Middle East.

The grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to be of much concern to my delegation. Violence has escalated in recent days in the Gaza Strip because of repeated Israeli incursions, ostensibly to prevent the firing of missiles by militants into Israeli towns. Regrettably, that has often resulted in lethal and harmful consequences for the Palestinian people.

It is unfortunate that the efforts of President Abbas at forming a Government of national unity have foundered on the issue of the recognition of Israel. In the larger interest of their people, we urge the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to cooperate and form a Government that will, we hope, enter into negotiations with Israel.

While the current woeful state of relations between Palestine and Israel does not augur well for the viability of such an undertaking, we are mindful of the continuing commitment of President Abbas to a platform of peace and the stated readiness of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to engage his Palestinian partner, which should encourage us to endeavour to bring those leaders together for the resumption of peace negotiations.

Once again, we appeal to Israel to take steps to end the financial boycott of the Palestinian Authority — a measure that would greatly assist the Administration in meeting its financial obligations and would bring relief to the Palestinian people, who have suffered from the dire consequences of the withholding of funds.

There is no military solution to the conflict in the Middle East. Cognizant of that political reality, the Security Council acted rightly through resolution 1701 (2006) in bringing about the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon and laying the foundation for a sustainable ceasefire. By so doing, the Security Council underlined its important and crucial role in the search for comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The Security Council must continue to assert that role, and work assiduously towards the resolution of the Palestinian problem — which is indisputably at the core of the Middle East question — on the basis of Council resolutions and in accordance with the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. That is the surest way to guarantee the right of Israelis to their own State within well defined and secure boundaries and, equally, to guarantee the right of Palestinians to their own viable and independent State in order to ensure their freedom of movement and their right to development.

Mrs. Taj (United Republic of Tanzania): We too wish to thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his briefing and for his efforts in the Middle East. The United Republic of Tanzania remains gravely concerned at the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza strip, which has resulted in the loss of many lives, including those of women and children, and the destruction of critical infrastructure. The ongoing cycle of violence and counter-violence has lead to further tension in the region, at a time when the parties in the Middle East should be searching for ways to revitalize the stalled peace process. Negotiations for a two-State solution, based on the principle of land-for-peace, must be revived.

The current volatile situation in the Middle East is very disturbing. Israeli air strikes on heavily populated Palestinian areas, extrajudicial killings of alleged militants, tank shelling and major ground operations have continued unabated. Israel has demolished key Palestinian infrastructure, including the only power plant. Suicide attacks by Palestinians, as well as indiscriminate rocket and mortar fire at Israel, have also continued with no end in sight.

We are very concerned by the surge of intra-Palestinian violence, particularly in Gaza. The violence, coupled with the closure of key supply lines, is causing much hardship among the Palestinian people and the denial of their basic necessities, and thus constitutes a violation of their human rights. The non-payment of salaries to Palestinian workers is also contributing to their desperation and, in turn, breeds more violence.

Tanzania welcomes the commitment of President Mahmoud Abbas to peace and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's readiness to talk. We also welcome the efforts of Egyptian diplomats and other regional mediators,

and we encourage them to continue. We also look forward to the conference to be held in Paris in January, as announced by the representative of France.

Ordinary Israelis and Palestinians have also expressed, in many ways and on many occasions, their desire for a negotiated two-State solution as provided for in the relevant United Nations resolutions and in the road map. We believe that this is an opportune time for the Hamas-led Government to commit itself to the principles set out by the Quartet, including recognition of Israel's right to exist, and to the principle of non-violence.

For its part, Israel should implement its obligations under the road map, including halting the construction of the barrier in the West Bank, freezing settlement activity and allowing freedom of movement by removing checkpoints and other restrictions on movement by the Palestinians. Without the resumption of free movement, a viable Palestinian economy will not be possible.

Israel should also reverse its decision to withhold customs and value-added tax payments that it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. The withholding of those payments, together with the withdrawal of aid by some donor Governments, has led to a serious fiscal crisis for the Palestinian Authority. It is high time to reconsider that position so as to avert a humanitarian crisis.

With regard to southern Lebanon, we are pleased to note that the situation has remained calm, enabling schools to reopen and other activities to return to normal. We welcome the efforts and contributions of all the countries that have made it possible for a return to relative peace in that area. We urge that action be taken to clear landmines, which continue to claim the lives of children in southern Lebanon. Lastly, we call for full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his informative briefing.

Last month, for the first time, the Security Council convened an historic meeting of ministers for foreign affairs on the situation in the Middle East. That indicates the importance that the Council attaches to that situation and its resolve to revitalize the Middle East peace process. Regrettably, however, more than a month later, the Middle East peace process remains stagnant, without any significant progress. That lack of progress is a cause of deep concern and worry.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is the oldest item on the Council's agenda and the only one that has been drawn the sustained attention of the international community over a long period. The absence of a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict has not only affected the lives of the peoples in the countries of the Middle East — including Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt — but has also touched the hearts of peoples throughout the world. The achievement at an early date of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security are the shared objectives and aspirations of the international community.

Over the past half-century, there has been no lack of efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The land-for-peace principle set out at the Madrid Conference, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative have been positive and useful attempts in that regard.

At this point, the root cause and the way out of the conflict require that the parties demonstrate political courage, overcome interference, gradually establish mutual trust, relaunch the peace talks as soon as possible and implement the commitments that they have both made. To that end, the two sides should adopt a forward-looking approach and make the necessary compromises and concessions. Peace cannot be achieved through suicide bombings or hostage-taking; nor can it be achieved through separation walls, economic sanctions or unilateral attempts to prejudge the issues related to final status.

While the parties concerned are making efforts, the international community must not sit idly by, but should take action to help the parties move forward towards their common goal. In that connection, we welcome the Quartet's decision last month to hold regular meetings with the parties and the countries in the region and jointly monitor the developments on the ground and try to find the road to development. We hope that the Quartet, as the primary mechanism for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, will play a proactive role in that regard. At the same time, the Security Council, as the primary organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security,

should undertake innovative efforts in playing its role and shouldering its responsibilities.

The decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict has caused many mothers to lose their sons and many wives to lose their husbands. The former land of peace and serenity, flowing with milk and honey, has become a land flowing with blood and tears. We can no longer remain silent. We must let the seeds of peace take root in the fertile soils of the Middle East to create a better life for future generations. That is our historic responsibility. We hope that peace in the Middle East can be achieved as soon as possible.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his truly excellent briefing and his valuable observations.

I wish to emphasize that Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement to be made shortly by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

Last month, our ministers had a very useful exchange of ideas on the recent developments in the Middle East. Slovakia is encouraged by the opinion prevailing in the Security Council on the need to revive the peace process in the region and to move forward in promoting a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict. At the same time, we believe that the international community must undertake additional efforts and steps to reinvigorate the peace process in that region.

As far as Lebanon is concerned, we emphasize once again the need for all parties concerned to implement all relevant Security Council resolutions. That is the most effective way, and the only way, to avoid tragic developments such as those that we experienced last summer.

We welcome the continuous process of the reconstruction of Lebanon, the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces to the south of the country, the significant reinforcement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. We are pleased that a number of steps have been taken to stabilize the situation and to enforce border control in the region. However, a lot remains to be done, including respecting the arms embargo, which must be fully observed by all relevant parties. In our view, a constructive approach and cooperation on the part of the Governments of Syria and of other countries in this regard remain instrumental.

The domestic and foreign militias in Lebanon must be disarmed and disbanded expeditiously in order to ensure that there are no unauthorized weapons in Lebanon and that there is no authority other than the Lebanese State.

We also underline the necessity of resolving the issue of the Sheba'a farms and the delineation of the border between Syria and Lebanon.

Last but not least, we should not forget the kidnapped Israeli soldiers. We call on all parties in Lebanon to help to secure their release. We also accept that there is a need to address the problem of Lebanese prisoners. Those two issues, however, must not be linked, and the release of the Israeli soldiers must be immediate and unconditional.

We note with satisfaction the recent call of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert for the initiation of direct talks with Lebanon. In this regard, I would like to ask Mr. De Soto if he would share with us his views on the prospects and conditions for such talks, and tell us what role the international community could play in facilitating an early engagement between Israel and Lebanon through meaningful dialogue.

As far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, we are convinced that the Quartet represents the most appropriate mechanism for advancing the peace process. We note with satisfaction that, in its most recent statement, the Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to the principles set out in the road map, and we support its efforts to revive the peace process in the Middle East.

As for developments on the ground, we remain disturbed by the security situation in the Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza. We hope and reiterate our call for an immediate end to violence by Palestinian factions and for the release of the abducted Israeli soldier. We urge the Palestinian Authority to undertake all necessary measures to improve internal security, as well as to prevent terrorist attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres. We support the efforts and leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas aimed at achieving that goal and fostering national unity among

the Palestinians. We hope that the Palestinian Government will cooperate towards that end.

We also note and support the efforts of President Abbas to form a Government of national unity. We expect that such a Government will be committed to the Quartet principles, and that its political platform will facilitate early engagement, as well as the continuation of a meaningful dialogue aimed at finding a solution to the Middle East conflict.

We remain deeply concerned about the difficult economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. In this regard, we strongly support the continuation and expansion of the Temporary International Mechanism, which will enable resources be to channelled and assistance to be delivered directly to the Palestinian people, and hence address their urgent humanitarian and financial needs. To this end, we urge Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues, and encourage it to carry out this transfer via the Temporary International Mechanism. We also call for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and appeal for the Rafah, Karni and other border crossings to remain permanently open.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm our shared belief in the need to reinvigorate the peace process. The window of opportunity to do so still exists. We hope and believe that all concerned and relevant parties will seize this opportunity and take concrete and immediate actions. In this regard, we encourage an early engagement between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas with a view to relaunching mutual and meaningful negotiations. We encourage such continuous engagement among all parties to the Middle East conflict.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this monthly meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto for the informative, comprehensive and updated briefing that he gave us today.

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

At the ministerial-level meeting of the Council held in September, our foreign ministers expressed their commitment to move the peace process forward on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the agreed terms of reference and the road map. Since then, unfortunately, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has been deteriorating at an alarming pace. Rhetoric from both sides is becoming increasingly hostile, rather than the opposite, and if we are to take a number of recent statements by high-ranking officials at face value, we seem to be on the brink of another catastrophic escalation of violence.

In the context of the very tense, volatile and potentially explosive situation in the Palestinian territories, the international community has invested substantial resources, both human and material, to ensure that stability will prevail in southern Lebanon, through the full implementation of all aspects of resolution 1701 (2006), and that a lasting ceasefire will be secured and consolidated.

We look forward to continued encouraging progress in this regard, but at the same time we are extremely concerned about the potential destabilizing effect that the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories could have in the region.

It is therefore of paramount importance for the international community and, in particular, the Quartet, to remain actively involved and engaged with the parties, to appeal for restraint to be exercised by both sides so as to prevent the situation from spiralling out of control, and to encourage the resumption of dialogue.

While we support the efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas to form a Government of national unity in accordance with his proposed platform for peace, we cannot ignore the fact that the absence of credible political prospects for the realization of the legitimate and recognized aspirations of the Palestinian people for genuine and viable statehood makes his task an extremely difficult one — a task whose outcome is as yet highly uncertain.

In this respect, the absence of a credible political process leading to progress in the realization of the two-State solution needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The Palestinian Authority and its institutions are on the brink of collapse. If we allow that to happen, we will be faced with a worst-case scenario, as such a development will only compound and exacerbate existing factional tensions among Palestinian groups

and may lead to a complete breakdown of law and order in the Palestinian territories.

It is in the interests of all of us, not least the neighbouring States, not to allow this to happen. We expect the Quartet to urgently move forward on the basis of its agreement reached in September, and to meet on a regular basis at the level of both principals and envoys, including with the parties and other regional partners, in order to monitor the developments and actions taken by the parties and to discuss the way ahead.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to welcome, on behalf of my delegation, the new Permanent Representative of Peru, Mr. Jorge Voto-Bernales Gatica. We wish him every success in the Security Council for the remainder of this year and throughout next year.

I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, for his excellent briefing. On behalf of the Argentine Government, I would like to express our appreciation for his ongoing efforts aimed at achieving peace in the Middle East.

My country is particularly concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip. We regret to note that it continues to deteriorate at an alarming pace. Israeli military operations, the actions of Palestinian extremist groups and the increasing political tensions between followers of Hamas and Fatah are the main factors contributing to this deterioration. The Palestinian civilian population is the main victim of this violence and suffers the most from the profound economic crisis of the Gaza Strip. If this violence were to continue, we would risk greater fragmentation and radicalization of Palestinian society and a possible collapse of the Palestinian Authority, which would be a terrible and perhaps irreversible setback in the search for peace. We must do everything possible to avoid this regrettable scenario. We also regret that the negotiations to form a Palestinian Government of national unity have proven so far unsuccessful. Argentina firmly supports the efforts of President Abbas with a view to ensuring that the programme of the Palestinian Government reflects the three basic peace principles set forth by the international community. We hope that, in spite of the difficulties encountered, these efforts will continue and that the leaders of Hamas will reconsider their position.

The Israeli people and the Government of Israel have the right to demand that the attacks with Qassam rockets against villages of southern Israel cease and that Corporal Gilad Shalit be released without preconditions. My delegation fully supports without reservations these demands. At the same time, my country believes that a purely military response and the disproportionate use of force will not achieve the desired results and will only contribute to increasing the suffering of the Palestinian people and to strengthening the positions of those who within Palestine want to advocate more violence. The Palestinian people also has the right to demand that the closures and restrictions of movement are eased, that the crossings in and out of Gaza are kept permanently open, that the military operations that affect innocent civilians are put to an end and that the members of the Government and Palestinian Legislative Council, who were arrested last month, are released. We should also put an end to the construction of the separation barrier and all new settlement activity should be frozen. My country also supports these demands and calls upon Israel to fulfil them. We also request Israel, through the appropriate international mechanisms, to transfer all tax and customs revenues that have been withheld since the beginning of 2006.

In the end, it is essential to keep in mind that the majority of Palestinians and Israelis agree on something, namely, that there is no military solution to this conflict and that a two-State solution cannot be achieved through unilateral actions by either side. My delegation is convinced that in the future the Security Council and the Quartet must be more active and effective in the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East. The principles of that peace are well known to all of us and do not need to be reinvented. We do not need to repeat them here. What we do need is a credible political process based on dialogue, implementation in parallel of mutual obligations and international monitoring of performance and fulfilment of benchmarks. This is why we believe that in the forthcoming months the Quartet should focus decisively on revitalization of the road map with a view to adjusting some of its provisions. We feel that the time for action has come.

With regard to the situation in Lebanon, we are generally pleased with the progress made in implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and we thank the Secretary-General for the work he has done

and we thank UNIFIL as well for the work that they have done in this regard. However, we are also aware that a lot still remains to be done. We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. We are seriously concerned about the use of cluster bombs by Israel in Lebanon, which constitute a threat to the civilian population, humanitarian agencies and even to the personnel of UNIFIL. We feel that Israel should provide all relevant information regarding the areas most affected by these weapons and the quantities and types of bombs used. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace are also a reason for concern. We feel that they must cease immediately.

With regard to other aspects of the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we support the measures that the Lebanese Government could undertake for the disarmament of Hizbollah and to ensure that there are no armed groups or weapons south of the Litani River besides the regular armed forces operating in that area. The events of the past months demonstrate that it is imperative to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Such a peace should encompass the Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks. With regard to the last one, we hope that the parties will start negotiations in order to put an end to the occupation of the Golan Heights in compliance with resolution 338 (1973).

Argentina believes that in the current circumstances, this Security Council and the broad international community should avoid the temptation of inaction and complacency. On the contrary, our priority should be to revitalize the peace process with a view to fully realizing the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East to security, dignity and recognition.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): I join other members in thanking Mr. De Soto for his comprehensive briefing and express to him our appreciation for the excellent work being done on the Middle East. First, regarding the Palestinian issue, which is at the core of the problems in the Middle East, we must express our deep concern over the political deadlock and the ever deteriorating law and order situation, made further worse by the recent disputes and clashes between Hamas and Fatah. The worsening economic and humanitarian conditions among the large segment of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, are cause of serious concern on the part of the international community. To break out of the current stalemate, we urge people in Palestine to find ways to overcome their differences and support a new national unity government that will be formed at the earliest possible date in order to restore law and order and improve the political climate.

Japan strongly expects that the new Palestinian Government will make it clear to the international community that it seeks to achieve coexistence and mutual prosperity with its neighbour Israel. If the Palestinian Government makes it clear and sends a strong message that it will pursue peace through dialogue, then the international community should not wait to support actively such a policy. We expect that Israel for its part should support and respond positively to the efforts of President Abbas aimed at promoting such a goal. We must express our concern also at the continuing fighting between Israel and Palestinian military groups since the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit at the end of June. We call upon the Palestinians to work towards the safe return of the abducted soldier and stop attacking Israel.

Japan also renews its call upon Israel to exercise maximum restraint and release the Palestinian ministers and parliament members held in custody. We also express our concern about Israel's move to expand its settlements.

Nothing is more important for the solution of problems, especially at this critical moment, than direct talks between the parties at the highest level. We strongly expect an early resumption of the long-delayed direct talks between the leaders of the two parties, Israel and Palestine.

The rapidly deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation among Palestinians is a matter of deep concern. We reiterate our call on the international community and Israel to continue and augment the needed assistance. In this regard, we stress that an early resumption by the Israeli Government of the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority is of primary importance, as is the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access.

On our part, Japan's pledge of $25 million in additional humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, made in July, is being implemented. The proposal launched by Japan for creating a corridor for peace and prosperity to promote regional cooperation

for development, coexistence and mutual prosperity in the region in the mid- to long-term is being tackled by officials of the four parties concerned — Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Japan — with a view to implementing it at an early date.

On the situation in Lebanon, Japan welcomes that the cessation of hostilities has generally held under Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), with the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from Lebanese territory and the steady deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and Lebanese forces in the south. Here, we commend all those countries contributing to UNIFIL, including those from Asia.

On the other hand, serious efforts are needed to address the issues mentioned in the resolution, including disarmament of the militias and the delineation of Lebanon's international borders, with the continued support of the international community. Stability in Lebanon is indispensable to achieve comprehensive peace and stability in the entire Middle East region. Having this in mind, Japan, for its part, will consider providing appropriate assistance to Lebanon's recovery and reconstruction efforts.

We wish also to emphasize the importance of Syria's role in achieving stability in Lebanon and peace in the whole region. Japan strongly expects from Syria positive, constructive engagement in and cooperation with the efforts by the international community to this end.

Japan will continue to be engaged, working with all concerned countries in the region with a view to defusing the tension, restoring stability and nurturing the spirit of cooperation in the region.

I now resume my function as President of the Security Council.

At this juncture, I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I shall now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to congratulate you and your friendly country for having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We have cordial and solid relations with your country. We are convinced that you will successfully conduct the work of the Council, thanks to your skill and efficiency.

I must also thank your predecessor, Mr. Adamantios Vassilakis, for having guided the work of the Council last month with skill, wisdom and effectiveness. I would also like to thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his full and detailed report on the question.

As we meet, the Gaza Strip is victim of a ferocious campaign and brutal aggression by the Israeli forces, which confirm the Israeli bid to expand the war in Gaza. That is what we referred to in the letters addressed to you, Mr. President, to the President of the General Assembly, and to the Secretary-General. In those letters, we drew attention to the seriousness of the plans by Israel, the occupying Power. Indeed, Israel occupied the border zone between Gaza and Egypt and penetrated the Rafah region south of Gaza by several kilometres, as part of a military campaign by the occupying Power under Operation Rainman, which has led to more than 29 martyrs, including women and children.

In August 2005, Israel adopted a unilateral measure, without coordinating with the Palestinian Authority, when it withdrew its occupying forces from Gaza. We then witnessed an Israeli official declaring in the Council that

> "the Palestinians had two choices. The first was to care for their own people, raise their standard of living, improve their quality of life, and concentrate on the welfare and well-being of their own people. The second was to turn Gaza into a terror base and a launching pad for deadly rockets into Israel. Tragically, the Palestinian leadership chose the latter" (*S/PV.5488, p. 7*).

In fact, before even launching the attack against Gaza, before carrying out its unilateral disengagement from Gaza, Israel contributed to the worsening economic, social and humanitarian crisis there by isolating Gaza from the rest of the world and from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories. At the very time when the occupying Power pretends to the world that it has ended its occupation of Gaza, it has tightened its grip on the border areas of Gaza, its territorial waters and airspace, with the result that Gaza has become a huge prison, completely encircled by Israeli forces.

So where is that option that Israel was talking about? The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has deteriorated very seriously. It is very tragic at all levels: economic, social, political and humanitarian. That is due to Israel's persistence in implementing its illegal policies and practices, which we have seen recently in the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israel against a besieged population in the Gaza Strip, in extrajudicial killings, and in its incursions into Gaza with armoured vehicles, tanks and bulldozers to raze villages, towns and Palestinian refugee camps. All this has led to the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians, including women and children, and to the destruction of the civil infrastructure, including the only electricity company in Gaza, electricity networks, water supply networks, bridges and roads. Israel has blocked all crossing points and has continued to build its military barriers and check points, thereby turning Palestinian towns and villages into ghettoes and causing destruction to Gaza's economy.

Israel's deliberate acts of aggression against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip began on 28 June 2006 and have resulted in over 350 martyrs and more than 1,000 persons wounded, of whom 80 per cent are civilians and about two-thirds are women and children. In recent days alone Israel killed more than 26 Palestinians. In addition, Israel has employed a new approach, namely, psychological warfare, to force hundreds of Palestinian families to flee Gaza in terror as a result of telephone threats made by members of the occupying forces in which they were informed that they had a very short time to leave their homes before they would be bombed and destroyed. That is in addition to the deafening sonic booms caused by Israeli planes overhead, which terrorize and intimidate the Palestinian people, especially children. According to the latest report of the United Nations Relief Works Administration (UNRWA), the ongoing aggression against civilians in Gaza has led to the displacement of thousands of residents.

Israel has also continued its detention policy, which has thus far resulted in the arrest of more than ten thousand Palestinians, including elected members of Parliament, members of the Government and several mayors.

In addition, Israel has appropriated tax and customs revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, thereby violating the Paris Protocol, which was signed by both parties in 1994. As a result, there has been deterioration in the economic and financial situation, which has had a serious effect on the Palestinian Authority. Despite numerous appeals by the international community to release the funds withheld by Israel, it has continued its policy to starve and besiege the Palestinian people.

Despite all that, Israel continues to refer to the two options available to the Palestinian people and Authority.

During the sacred month of Ramadan — contrary to Israel's assertion that Jerusalem is a city open to all religions — the racist practices of the occupying Power have prevented large numbers of Palestinian Muslims from visiting places of prayer in the Holy City of Jerusalem. This practice has been repeated in the case of Christian Palestinians as well. Nevertheless, extremist settlers have full unhindered access to places of worship in Jerusalem.

The goal of Israel's attacks against the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, of its outright destruction of some of those institutions and of its detention and imprisonment of Palestinian leaders, officials of the Authority and members of Parliament is to continue to carry out illegal unilateral measures in the territory by pretending that there is no partner for peace. The Palestinian Authority categorically rejects any unilateral plans by the Israelis in the West Bank, because the purpose of such plans is to annex more territory as a fait accompli and annex the occupied Eastern part of Jerusalem and create security cordons along the River Jordan. That in addition to expanding settlements and continuing to build the apartheid wall of separation, in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 and

relevant United Nations resolutions. The result of that would obviate the possibility of a peaceful resolution in which two States live side by side in peace and security and would lay the seeds for another war between the two sides.

President Abbas has often spoken about the need to resume negations towards a lasting solution based on international law and agreements, United Nations resolutions, the Quartet road map and the Arab peace initiative. Those numerous appeals have fallen on deaf ears in Israel.

Israel's land and air attacks as the occupying Power on the Gaza Strip, as well as its illegal practices throughout the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, only serve to intensify destabilization and the deterioration of the situation in the region. They also create a fait accompli that could have long-term negative consequences on security in the region and on peace and security throughout the world. The Council is the only body able to act in that regard. It has a duty to immediately redouble its efforts to protect Palestinian civilians and put an end to Israel's ongoing aggression, collective punishment and blockades, which have served to break up the contiguity of Palestinian territory, isolating it from the rest of the world. It must also put an end to the crimes being carried out with impunity against the Palestinian people by the occupying forces and bring the perpetrators of those acts to justice.

In the light of the latest negative developments in the region and the increasingly deteriorating situation, Arab ministers for foreign affairs decided once again to inform the Security Council about the situation in the Middle East and to place this agenda item before it. They called upon the Council to hold a special high-level meeting on the situation. The Council, in fact, held such a meeting last month, at which Arab ministers and President Abbas participated, in an effort to reaffirm the need for the Council to act immediately and come up with the necessary mechanisms and timetables for the implementation of relevant Council resolutions with a view to reaching a comprehensive, just and lasting solution in the region and bringing about peace and stability.

That is the choice of the Arabs — the choice of peace — as contained in the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Arab summit held in Beirut in March 2002. The decision of the Arab ministers to come to the Council was unanimous, despite its past inability to adopt the measures necessary to resolve the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question and the question of East Jerusalem, and its failure to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions. The ministers felt it necessary to bring this issue before the Council, convinced as they were of its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and of the need to help all parties to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the problem. Had it responded, the Council would have discharged its mandate with respect to international relations, the maintenance of international peace and security and the implementation of the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law.

We have stated on previous occasions our firm conviction that the Council must fulfil its responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security and the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including the Palestinian people, who are living under the yoke of Israeli occupation. Our conviction is based on the principles set out in the Charter and international law, and it is that conviction which has prompted us to address the Security Council on multiple occasions.

As I said at the beginning of my statement, while Israel may claim that the Palestinian Authority has only two choices, it is Israel itself that now must choose between two options. The first is to end its occupation of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the Arab territories occupied since 1967, and allow the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable national rights to self-determination, create their own independent State, and achieve a just settlement of the refugee problem in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). That is the way to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and to permit the people of the region to enjoy peace, security, stability and prosperity.

Israel's second option is to continue to entrench its occupation, build settlements, and pursue the construction of the separation wall and its military aggression against the Palestinian people. Most unfortunately, Israel has opted for that second option of State terrorism and war crimes.

As for us, the choice of the Palestinians and the Arabs in general is that of peace. If the Israeli authorities truly wish to live in peace, ensure regional

stability and security, and live side by side with a Palestinian State enjoying full sovereignty over all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, with its capital in the holy city of Jerusalem, it is high time that it chose the first option, cease its aggression, its illegal practices and its occupation of Arab territories, and respect international law and the legitimacy of international resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for your continued and able stewardship of the Council this month. In particular, I would like to commend you on your steadfast leadership in response to the restated global challenges which were revealed last week. I would also like to thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his informative briefing on the Middle East.

Positive currents are flowing in the Middle East. Moderate voices are beginning to surface courageously where they have been suppressed or ignored in the past. But before I delve into some of those aspects, an outstanding and highly pressing concern must first be addressed.

In Israel, every day, we are tortured by unimaginable anxiety and shattered hopes, painfully awaiting the safe return of our boys, the Israeli soldiers — Gilad Shalit, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev — who were callously abducted earlier this summer by Hamas and Hizbollah. This Council, in its unanimous adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), took upon itself the responsibility to secure their unconditional release. I ask Council members now, as I did then, to do their utmost to alleviate this humanitarian crisis and bring them home.

Israel welcomes the steps taken by its Arab neighbours and other moderate Arab leaders in the region seeking to follow through on their commitments to peace. Those positive voices from the Arab and Muslim world show a genuine desire to embark on a path of historic reconciliation and mutual advancement. Regrettably, different voices are still sometimes heard in this building — including those heard just a few minutes ago — which too often fail to reflect the dramatically changing world we live in. One of our major tasks is to narrow the gap between what is heard and done in the "real world" and what is still too often heard and done on First Avenue.

Roughly two months ago, the clarion call of resolution 1701 (2006) went forth from this Chamber. Resolution 1701 (2006) sent a clear and unambiguous message that the international community will not tolerate a State within State, be it Hizbollah or any other terrorist organization. The strength of that conviction and that resolution is a test for this Council.

Today, two and a half weeks after the last Israeli soldier left southern Lebanon, the situation along the northern border has begun to stabilize. The Lebanese army is deployed throughout its territory. Today, there is one unequivocal address in Lebanon, and it is the Government of Lebanon.

Success, however, cannot be prematurely declared. Success will be determined only to the extent to which resolution 1701 (2006) is fully implemented. In that regard, there is reason to be concerned about the smuggling of arms across the border between Lebanon and Syria. Hizbollah's rearming not only violates the essence and strength of resolution 1701 (2006); it also places the entire region in immediate peril. There can be no ambiguity in policy here. The embargo must be enforced, and its violators must be held accountable.

As members of the Council know, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, speaking at the Israeli Knesset earlier this week, called upon Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to meet directly, without mediators, in order to make peace between our two countries. Israel is a serious and committed partner to a peace-seeking Government in Lebanon. The events of the recent summer — the conflict, suffering and pain — compel us all to rise above the culture of skepticism and distrust that often pervades our region and to forge a direct line of communication. Only in that way, through direct and open dialogue, can we bring peace to our two peoples.

While hostilities in the north have ceased, hostilities in the south have only escalated, indeed as a result of the Palestinians' tragic choice to, as my Palestinian colleague just verified, turn Gaza into a base for terror. During the month of September, no less than 45 Qassam rockets, launched by Palestinian terrorists from the Gaza Strip, pierced the ordinarily tranquil, blue skies of southern Israel and fell hard on our communities. Along with these rocket attacks comes daily psychological trauma, inflicted on an entire civilian population, whose only wish is to live in

peace and security. Israel, the children of Sderot in particular, sleeps under the constant threat of attack.

By now it is clear to all that the Hamas Government, not mentioned in the Palestinian statement, is currently leading the Palestinian Authority and driving it dangerously on a road that only leads to further isolation. As long as the Hamas Government fails to recognize Israel, accept and implement agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, terminate violence and eradicate terrorism — including, but not limited to the attacks on our southern communities — we cannot dialogue with it. These are conditions that have been recognized by the international community. Israel will not, and the international community should not, compromise on these conditions.

As you know, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni met with Chairman Abbas here in New York last month. In that meeting there was an agreement to reinvigorate the dialogue between us and establish a permanent channel for talks. There was also agreement on the road map and the principles for peace already confirmed between the parties. It is a real pity that this positive spirit was lacking in the Palestinian statement today.

As the escalation of violence in Gaza shows, the Hamas Government, the President of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people are not one and the same. As the violence continues, the world is beginning to recognize that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the consequence, not the cause of such ideology, intolerance and hatred. Today, the Palestinian people face a critical decision, one that can reverse their situation, a situation that they chose and for which they alone are responsible.

We are witnessing the rise of a new world order, where moral courage and authority is confused with militaristic chauvinism and pomposity. One day, future generations will pass judgment on the way in which the international community dealt with the rise of these nuclear threats.

To be sure, the swift action taken by this Council last week under your leadership, Mr. President, demonstrates the consensus view within the international community that rogue States cannot be allowed to threaten our global security. But at the same time, let there be no illusions. North Korea is only the prelude to a more disturbing story, namely, the emergence of a nuclear Iran, armed and willing to share its State terrorist capabilities with other unholy extremists who yearn to destroy us all. Indeed, North Korea is only the preview. A nuclear Iran is the main feature — coming soon, if we do not act resolutely, to a theatre near you.

Israel sees the Iranian threat as an existential one, not only to itself, but to the entire world as well. Iran's web of lies, perversions of history, and distortions of human destiny are lurid warnings for us to read the writing on the wall and respond now. The international community must be determined, clear and unequivocal in its plan of action. There is no room for hesitation, second-guessing or compromise. There is only one choice: the world must ensure that Iran does not attain nuclear weapons.

As I said earlier, we are bolstered by the surfacing of moderate voices in the region — voices that recognize the true threats facing us. The real, most urgent threat to stability and peace in the Middle East is Iran.

Today, many of you have mentioned, yet again, the need to release Corporal Gilad Shalit. I thank you for your commitment to seeking his release. It is in this context that I wish to share some very disturbing news with you. Just this morning, we heard news that Iran bribed Hamas leader Khalid Mashal, hosted graciously in Damascus by Syria, a regime famously hospitable to terrorists, with $50 million with the sole purpose of sabotaging the negotiations on the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit and preventing his release. If this is how Iran uses blackmail to threaten humanitarian initiatives I shudder to think about the lengths to which Iran will go, and may already be going, to undermine a diplomatic initiative and achieve its dangerous regional aspirations and nightmarish dreams of nuclear capability.

Since the opening of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, we have heard constructive speeches and statements echoing the recognition that Iran is the real threat. Moderates are now joining together to form an alliance against the extremists. We must bolster this coalition of the moderates and isolate the opposition formed by the extremists.

Global terrorism and extremism is moving us all closer together, uniting us in places where we thought only division and difference existed. The dawning of this new reality and recognition speaks to the very

depth of our conviction, and reflects the renewable optimism of life expressed so boldly by Alexander Pope: indeed, "Hope springs eternal".

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to extend to you, Sir, my sincerest congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We are sure that with your experience and skills you will be able to successfully conclude this month's work of the Council. On behalf of the Arab Group, I would also like to express our thanks to you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting dedicated to discussing the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I would also like to express my warm thanks and appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Greece for his distinguished presidency and for the efforts undertaken during his presidency of the Council last month. I also thank Mr. De Soto for the comprehensive briefing he has given us on the matter.

The Security Council held an important and historic meeting at the foreign ministers' levels last month that represented an important precedent with regard to the situation in the Middle East. It was convened at the initiative of the Foreign Affairs Council of the Arab States to review the deteriorating situation in the region. Bahrain presided over the Arab States' meeting and spoke on behalf of all members of the League of Arab States.

The Arab League feels that we have reached a very dangerous stage, because of the effects not only on the States of the region, but also on the rest of the world. The Arab-Israeli conflict is the core of the region's problems, and this has negative effects on the international community, because stability in that region means stability for the rest of the world. Without a comprehensive, just and lasting solution, the situation will only get worse for all.

When this matter was dealt with in the Security Council last month, the Council of Arab Foreign Affairs Ministers asked the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and to play the role assigned to it by the United Nations Charter in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Arab-Israeli conflict is unlike other conflicts, because it involves an occupation that has lasted for too long. Rights have been denied and threats continue to stoke the conflict. We fear that this will endanger the stability of the region and of the world as a whole.

Israel's occupation of Arab territories has sequels in all areas of life and has had disastrous consequences in the region, including human tragedy for millions of people. The occupation has also had negative effects on the development and stability of the region. The situation for the Palestinians has become extremely difficult, whether in the West Bank or in the Gaza Strip, which has witnessed ongoing conflict and blockades. Hospitals, Government ministries and institutions, and schools have all experienced difficult situations. If the deterioration worsens, it is hard to even imagine the repercussions of the situation and how we could ever possibly deal with them.

The Arab States have spoken before the Council several times and asked it to assume its responsibilities. We should not have to repeat our words at each Security Council meeting. It is no good if the Council merely listens but does not act to bring about practical measures that can improve the situation in the region. We need radical solutions to this conflict that has lasted for far too long. It is inadmissible that this conflict should last all these years despite the adoption of so many resolutions by the Security Council. If those resolutions had been implemented, the situation would not have negatively evolved as it has. The Arab States have said on several occasions that we must put an end to this conflict, using peaceful means, in order to bring peace and stability to the region. The peace process has stagnated, and this state of tension and frustration has given rise to violent conflict and has been a disaster for everyone.

It is high time to put an end to the stagnating situation and to move the peace process forward by implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative that was adopted at the Beirut Summit in 2002.

It is high time that the Security Council play its role in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, as it has done in solving other international problems. A solution should be based on the creation of a sovereign independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and on an end to the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories, going back to the 1967 borders,

including the occupied Syrian Golan, and withdrawal from the Lebanese Sheba'a Farms and other areas that have recently been occupied. All this should be done in conformity with relevant Security Council resolutions and according to the terms of reference of the peace process. The infringements on Lebanese air space should also cease.

The years of conflict have shown that there is no military solution and that the excessive use of force has not brought peace to the Israelis. The solution involves negotiations among all parties to the conflict, an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories, and courageous initiatives to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that is in everyone's interests.

Unilateral and isolated measures will be in vain. Peace based on justice and giving people their rights, however, is what would bring about stability and security for everyone. It is time for the Security Council to put an end to this conflict and to build genuine peace in the region so that prosperity and well-being will flourish in the region and the world. The time is ripe for us all to work together for the good of our peoples.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The following countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Iceland and Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

In recent months, the Middle East has once again witnessed turbulent times. It is now important for all of us to look ahead and work strenuously to stabilize the region.

In Lebanon, we have already seen some encouraging developments. The European Union welcomes the overall deployment of the Lebanese armed forces in southern Lebanon, supported by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We have noted the almost complete withdrawal of Israeli troops, and we call on Israel to withdraw also from the Lebanese part of the town of Ghajar, in coordination with UNIFIL. We stress that Lebanon's sovereignty over its land, sea and airspace must be respected. We also call for the immediate release of the two Israeli soldiers whose abduction sparked the Israeli military operation.

The European Union would once again like to reiterate its commitment to support the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

We can all recall the numerous useful meetings held during the General Assembly's ministerial week, including in the Council, on how to break the deadlock in the Middle East. There seems to be a consensus within the international community on the urgent need to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on relevant Security Council resolutions and the Road Map, and with a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at its core.

In order to achieve this, we first need to focus on the most pressing issues. The European Union remains deeply concerned at the continued Israeli operation in the Palestinian territories and deplores the loss of civilian life it has brought. It calls on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets into Israeli territory.

The recent intra-Palestinian clashes are also a cause of great concern. Violence is not the solution. We call for an end to violence and for restraint from all sides. Security is a matter of concern for everyone.

The European Union once again reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldier. We also repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody.

A very pressing issue is the question of the Palestinian Government. The European Union expresses its support to President Abbas and calls on the Palestinians to join his efforts towards national unity and the formation of a government with a political platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement. Such a government would also be a key factor in allowing the European Union to pursue its goal of strengthening the capacity of Palestinian institutions.

Another issue of utmost urgency is the alarming humanitarian and economic situation in the Palestinian territories. Sixty-five per cent of the Palestinians live below the poverty line and civil servants are on strike, since they have not been paid for many months. The European Union has done its utmost to find ways to alleviate the daily situation of the Palestinians. Our

combined assistance to the Palestinians in 2006 will be in excess of €650 million, which is more than in previous years. That assistance is channelled partly via the temporary international mechanism, and also through United Nations organizations and other channels. The temporary international mechanism has now been extended for a further three months, and we are currently examining the modalities for its expansion. We encourage other donors to make full use of the mechanism in order to address the needs of the Palestinian people.

The European Union also reiterates its call for an immediate resumption of the transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues by Israel, as this would also have a significant impact on the Palestinian economy. We have called on Israel to consider the resumption of such transfers via the temporary international mechanism, to improve the deteriorating economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. We also recall the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, particularly the permanent opening of the Rafah, Karni and other crossings.

We must all work to solve those pressing issues. We must bear firmly in mind the overriding goal: an early resumption of dialogue between the two parties with a view to relaunching negotiations on the basis of the Road Map. As long as this conflict is not resolved, peace will not be secured anywhere in the region. The European Union reiterates its continuing support to Israeli and Palestinian efforts to advance the peace process.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Cuba, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, upon your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for convening this meeting. We also thank Mr. De Soto for his briefing.

I have the honour to address the Council on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The international community has always been unequivocal in recognizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, rejecting Israel's illegal occupation of all Arab territories and demanding that Israel cease all violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

The continued Israeli escalation of its military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip has brought about the death or injury of hundreds of civilians, including women and children, and the deliberate and unwanted destruction of the property and vital infrastructure of the Palestinians. The occupying Power continues to carry out illegal measures, collective punishment and psychological terror against the Palestinian people, which cause great economic and social hardship in Gaza.

Since 25 June 2006, more than 280 Palestinians have died, including more than 60 children. More than 800 people have been severely injured. Due to the many incursions by Israel into Gaza territory, many families have had to abandon their homes. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates that more than 3,400 Palestinian refugees have sought shelter in UNRWA facilities.

The unilateral measures in force by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, pose a grave threat to the prospect of achieving a negotiated agreement based on a two-State solution.

In the Declaration on Palestine adopted at the fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana in September, the heads of State or Government of the 118 members of the Movement agreed to continue supporting the Palestinian people and its leadership, in order to promote a revitalization of the peace process towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace so that the Palestinian people can exercise its inalienable right to self-determination and establish an independent and sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel continues the illegal construction of the wall, in outright defiance of the relevant provisions of the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004 on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004. The wall divides the occupied Palestinian territory into isolated and fenced cantons, thereby destroying entire communities and cutting off occupied East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory. If the construction of the wall is not stopped or

reversed, it will be impossible to reach a two-State solution to the conflict.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's intensive settlement actions, among them the ongoing confiscation of large areas of land and the construction and expansion of settlements, as well as Israel's declared intention to implement the illegal E1 plan in and around East Jerusalem and to illegally annex the Jordan valley.

We continue to be concerned about the grave violations of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, such as the destruction and requisitioning of land and property; violations of the Palestinian people's freedom of movement and of their right to work, to health care, to education and to the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living; and the displacement of Palestinian civilians from their homes and lands.

Israel is under an obligation to terminate its breaches of international law, to cease the construction of the wall being built in the occupied Palestinian territory, to dismantle the structure therein situated, to repeal or render ineffective all legislative and regulatory acts relating thereto and to make reparation for all damage caused by the construction of the wall.

All States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention have the additional obligation of ensuring that Israel complies with the Convention. The United Nations, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council, must consider what other measures are needed to put an end to the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and its associated regime, taking the advisory opinion very much into account. Likewise, we request of the United Nations that, in accordance with paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution ES-10/15, the Secretary-General facilitate the establishment of a register of damage caused by the wall; he must ensure that the Secretariat's positions are fully consistent with the advisory opinion.

We, the States members of the Movement, call once again on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility to compel Israel to respect international law and to end the occupation and the illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, such as the imposition of collective punishment and unilateral sanctions on the Palestinian people and economy and the illegal construction of settlements and the wall, which is aimed at confiscating and annexing Palestinian land and property and altering the demographic and geographic character of the Palestinian territory.

In that connection, we remind the Security Council of its resolution 497 (1981), which decided that all actions and measures taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power — such as its illegal decision of 14 December 1981, aimed at altering the legal status, physical character, demographic composition and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to impose its jurisdiction and administration over that territory — are null and void and without legal effect. We reiterate our demand that Israel comply with resolution 497 (1981) and that it fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

We remain hopeful that the international community will do everything possible during this critical period to revive the peace process and to salvage the Road Map and promote its implementation in order to put an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory, that began on June 1967, including that of East Jerusalem, thus achieving a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and fulfilling the right of all the States and peoples in the region to live in peace and security.

In that connection, we stress the continued importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted at the Arab Summit held in Beirut in March 2002, and emphasize the importance of the recent call made at the eighteenth Summit of the League of Arab States, held at Khartoum in March 2006, for the revitalization of that Initiative.

We reaffirm once again the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council, for the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects on the basis of international law, including a just settlement of the difficult situation of the refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker on my list, I should like to inform the Council that I have just received a letter from the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which

he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statements just made by the Permanent Representative of Bahrain and the Permanent Representative of Cuba.

I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. I also wish to thank your predecessor for his considerable efforts in guiding the work of the Council, which culminated in the special ministerial meeting on the Arab-Israeli conflict held on 21 September 2006 as the result of a joint Arab initiative. At that meeting, the Secretary-General stated that "our continued failure to resolve this conflict calls into question the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Security Council itself" (*S/PV.5530, p. 2*). That failure becomes even more dangerous when one or two States prevent the Council from upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter and from shouldering its responsibilities in helping to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On many occasions over the decades, various States have assisted the Security Council in adopting dozens of resolutions — a number of them under Chapter VII — to help resolve conflicts less dangerous than the Arab-Israeli conflict and to address crises not requiring Council involvement. For reasons to which I have already alluded, the Security Council has often been unable to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions providing for the sending of fact-finding missions or missions to investigate Israeli violations of international law and humanitarian law in the occupied Arab territories.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is the longest-running conflict on the United Nations agenda; indeed, it is as old as the Organization itself. Decades have passed since Israel occupied the Arab territories, on 5 June 1967. The Council Chamber has been the scene of the unanimous adoption of resolutions such as resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) 425 (1978) and 497 (1981). Those resolutions, however, owe their fame to their long duration, unimplemented, and to the Council's inability to apply them to Israel, the occupying Power.

This undermines the credibility of the Council. Whenever the Council moves in the right direction and resolves to condemn the Israeli aggressor, the clock in the Council Chamber stops because of the use of the veto by one influential State, which allows Israel to avoid complying with the will of the international community. Thus, the occupation of our land in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon continues. In addition, violations of our rights and acts of provocation increase, and our patience and tolerance for injustice, aggression and repression is further put to the test.

An equitable and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is not impossible, if there is political will to achieve peace. Such political will, however, must be based on full, faithful and serious respect for the letter and spirit of international law. The Arabs have always contributed constructively in this regard. They have presented many peace initiatives, which have been greatly appreciated by the international community, the most recent of which was adopted at the Beirut Summit in 2002 — an initiative that Arab foreign ministers reaffirmed in full more than one month ago here in the Council.

It is increasingly clear that Israeli military supremacy cannot guarantee the continuation of the fait accompli imposed against the will of our people, who are chafing under the yoke of occupation and the frustration of their aspirations and rights. There must be political will to make peace by successive Israeli Governments and their protectors. Such peace must be based on justice, must be comprehensive and must reflect the will of the international community, as represented in the Council.

This question is not new to the Security Council or to the United Nations as a whole. It is not new in the context of international, regional and bilateral

relations. This question has long been discussed; it is constantly being raised at meetings throughout the world. Yet the Arab-Israeli conflict has not been resolved in keeping with the provisions of the Charter and international law. With the passage of time, this situation has had tragic repercussions and adverse consequences for the region.

Our land has long been occupied. The occupation has been immoral and illegal and has caused great suffering to millions. Weapons arsenals are growing, and our region has become a testing ground for a host of lethal weapons. One case in point is the lethal weapons used by Israel in its most recent acts of aggression against Lebanon, in which it dropped millions of cluster bombs on Lebanon after the Council adopted resolution 1701 (2006).

In our view, the responsibility for establishing a just and comprehensive peace is a collective one. No party should stand in the way of this responsibility. It is a common responsibility, because the benefits of a just and comprehensive peace will also be enjoyed in common. We must therefore talk about a just, comprehensive and true peace, not about supposed efforts to achieve peace that are actually unrelated to genuine peace.

President Bashar Al-Assad has consistently talked about a peace based on principles, not on manoeuvres, because only a peace based on principles is founded on law and on the well-known terms of reference. Thus, a peace based on principles is the only kind of peace that can endure. The President of the Syrian Arab Republic has made many statements about the need for peace in the region, and the international community has taken a keen interest in his position and has appreciated it. Indeed, some distinguished colleagues, including Mr. De Soto himself, have referred to that position during this meeting.

What has the Israeli response been to Syria's peaceful intentions? The Israeli Prime Minister told the Israeli Knesset that Israel will not withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and that the Golan is part and parcel of Israel. His statement made no sense; many Israeli statesmen and many in the Israeli media strongly criticized him for his lack of political realism, for his disregard for the reality of the situation and for ignoring the importance of Syria in establishing peace in the region. Without the restoration of the occupied Golan to Syria in accordance with the borders of 4 June 1967, Israel will not enjoy peace. Nobody can impose an imaginary peace — one that enables Israel to continue its occupation of our usurped land. Indeed, the continuation of the occupation simply means the absence of peace.

The Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom expressed his country's concern about what he called Syria's role in financing and arming groups inside Lebanon. He said that we should support the peace process instead of supporting terrorism, as terrorism endangers the stability of the Middle East. That is a distorted reading of the facts on the ground and does not reflect the numerous reports presented by the United Nations itself, including reports from the Security Council and by Secretariat representatives and envoys, about the positive political role played by Syria with regard to events in the region. Britain shoulders the bulk of the moral and political responsibility for sowing the seeds of the Arab-Israeli conflict, given its unilateral actions. Those actions determined the fate of Palestine, which it occupied until 1948. Britain knows full well the identity of the real terrorism from which the region is suffering. Many British nationals fell victim to the explosion of the King David Hotel in Al-Quds and other Israeli explosions and killings that included many United Nations special envoys, such as Count Bernadotte and others.

Given its long experience in the Security Council, Britain knows that United Nations records are replete with official reports that talk about Israeli terrorism in the region. When it comes to the appeal that we support the peace process, this runs counter to the fact of Syria's abiding by the peace process as a strategic option and its numerous calls for resuming it.

The irrational questioning of our deep belief in peace affirms the validity of our position that some do not possess real political will for a just and comprehensive peace. Numerous speakers today, particularly Mr. Alvaro de Soto, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, stated that Syria is for peace, and the President of Syria has called for peace many times. The Israeli response to those initiatives was in the form of provocations, intransigence, rejection of peace and unsound declarations.

My country moved part of our border guards from our border with Iraq to the borders with Lebanon, in implementation of our commitment to resolution 1701 (2006), despite our reservations over some of its items. The Secretary-General repeatedly referred to Syria's fulfilment of its obligations and that it has not reneged on any of its pledges. This Council knows that my country requested European technical devices and equipment to monitor the long border with Lebanon, a border 351 kilometres-long, two months after adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). We still wait for the delivery of the equipment to us.

My country is participating in reconstructing many Lebanese villages destroyed by Israeli military machinery. We provide Lebanon with electricity and we help hundreds of thousands of Lebanese refugees who fled Israeli attacks. We also have enabled many Lebanese students whose universities were destroyed in Lebanon to come to our universities. We placed our ports and airports at the service of Lebanon when it was surrounded by Israel, when Israel destroyed its infrastructure and polluted its coasts and our coasts, when Israel bombarded the oil station in Lebanon. My country did not kill any elements of the UNIFIL forces, nor did it commit war crimes or crimes against humanity in Palestine or Lebanon. My country did not carry out the first and second massacres in Qana; my country did not detain democratically elected ministers and parliamentarians; my country does not establish a racist separation wall on occupied land; my country does not impose a criminal blockade on defenseless people. State terrorism with regard to Israel is well known to any fledgling diplomat. Nobody should have any second thoughts about writing that expression.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Sadeghi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this timely and important debate to address the pressing issue of the Middle East, particularly the crimes of the Zionist regime in the region. We appreciate your skilful stewardship of the Council's work for this month. We extend our sincere gratitude to the ambassador of Greece and his colleagues for the efficient way they presided over and handled the work of the Council last month. I also thank Mr. de Soto for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

For almost six decades now the atrocious Israeli aggression and its State terrorism, coupled with several unfortunate efforts on the part of some quarters to support the atrocities of the Zionist regime as the source of crises and conflict in the region, have made the Middle East the most tense region in the world. The Israeli regime has based its very existence on pursuing war, violence and bloodshed in Palestine and in the wider region.

Just recently, the people of the United Nations, particularly those in the Middle East, witnessed with anguish and indignation the blatant ill-intended and preplanned aggression and multiple war crimes perpetrated by the Israeli regime against the peoples of Palestine and Lebanon. For 34 long days an extensive indiscriminate and unspeakable bombing campaign against civilians and civilian infrastructure across Lebanon went on before any action was taken by the Security Council. As a result, thousands of innocent Lebanese civilians were murdered or maimed and hundreds of thousands turned homeless, while the stability of the wider region was also seriously threatened. Throughout that period of horror and Israeli terror, the whole world witnessed the unbridled and indiscriminate barbarism of the Israeli regime against Lebanese civilians as, joined by its allies, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, it pursued their desire to wreck havoc in a whole country despite the tragic human toll.

The brutality of the Israeli regime was too blatant to be concealed by their own mass media, and the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported recently that "Israel flooded Lebanon with cluster bombs and phosphorous shells" during its deadly aggression. The same newspaper reported that the Israeli army fired more than 1,800 cluster bombs, containing over 1.2 million cluster bomblets, during that onslaught. It quoted an Israeli military official as saying, "we covered entire villages with cluster bombs. What we did there was crazy and monstrous." The same Israeli military official has said,

> "Multiple-launch-rocket-systems platforms were used in Lebanon despite the fact that they are known to be highly inaccurate and that a high percentage of them do not explode and become mines. Even reserve soldiers were shocked by the army's decision to use these rockets in Lebanon because these are the judgment-day weapon that would be used only in a full-scale war."

Describing the Israeli regime's use of cluster bombs in Lebanon as immoral, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, also reported very recently that thousands of civilians in south Lebanon are at risk from unexploded cluster bombs dropped by Israeli forces in the last three days of the war. He further said recently,

> "What is shocking and completely immoral is that 90 per cent of the cluster bomb strikes by Israel occurred in the last 72 hours of the conflict, when we knew there would be a resolution, when we knew there would be an end".

He also said that the bombs may have been manufactured "in a number of places, including the United States".

All this simply went on while inaction and handicaps, were imposed on the Security Council for many weeks, preventing it from fulfilling its primary responsibility. That inaction allowed a whole population to suffer such terrible pain and loss and proved very costly to the Council's credibility and integrity. The people of Lebanon courageously resisted and defeated the wicked Israeli aggressors and proved yet again that while the war machine of the aggressor may be able to shatter the lives and livelihoods of the people and lay waste to buildings and infrastructures, it is impossible to intimidate a nation that is determined to resist aggression, is resolute in the fight for its dignity and is unwavering in its determination to live free from occupation and terror.

Although belatedly called for, the cessation of hostilities was nevertheless a relief for Lebanese civilians and for the whole international community, which was frustrated by the horrors of Israel State terrorism and disappointed by the inaction of the Security Council.

Ever since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), another tired and expected pattern of defiance by the Israeli regime has been on display. As the result of such Israeli defiance, the Secretary-General stated on 19 August 2006 that he was "deeply concerned about a violation by the Israeli side of the cessation of hostilities". Later on, the Secretary-General, in his report dated 12 September (S/2006/730), further reported many instances of violations by the Israeli regime of the cessation of hostilities and of resolution 1701 (2006). These violations have continued to date and need to be seriously addressed and resolutely countered by the Security Council.

The crimes of the Israeli regime have continued and even increased in the Palestinian territories as well. The Gaza Strip was enduring the same aggression by the Israeli regime when Lebanon was attacked. The criminal Israeli regime is continuing those atrocities unabated. Warplanes, tanks and thousands of troops invaded the Strip only a few days before the Israeli regime's onslaught in Lebanon, targeting civilians and purely civilian infrastructures, destroying main bridges, disabling the only power plant, making main roads impassable and bombarding the Strip with heavy artillery fire and from the air. Indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli army, collective punishment, extrajudicial killings, targeted assassinations, abduction of the Palestinian authorities and the expansion of illegal settlements are but a few of the other clear breaches of basic international standards and law committed by the Israeli regime in the Palestinian territories.

In addition, in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the unambiguous calls of the international community, the Israeli regime not only continues the construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territories but has even accelerated plans for completion. Moreover, the Palestinian economy is already strangulated and under an unjust and illegal embargo. In this regard, Mr. Egeland, the top United Nations humanitarian affairs official, referring to the misery and hardships inflicted on the innocent Palestinian as a result of the illegal practices of the Israeli regime, said recently that Gaza "is a ticking time-bomb" — as was also mentioned by Mr. De Soto this morning.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) also recently warned that the Gaza economy could shrink next year to the level of 15 years ago and unemployment could rise to more than 50 per cent. It is regrettable that, despite such unspeakable crimes by the Israeli regime and so much shocking suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people, the Security Council has been rendered incapacitated to address this issue, thus completely failing to live up to its responsibility in addressing a crisis which is in the truest sense of the word a threat to international peace and security.

Undoubtedly, attaining a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the realization of comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. Aggression, State terrorism, intimidation and occupation will not bring about peace in the Middle East.

It has become a patented and indeed a tired practice and a smokescreen for the Israeli representative to raise baseless and absurd allegations against others, including my country, in this Council in a failed attempt to deflect the international community's attention from the horrendous terrorist acts and crimes against humanity that have been and continue to be perpetrated by the Israeli regime in the Middle East.

Before concluding, allow me to place on record that my Government categorically rejects the baseless allegations against Iran that were repeated today in the Council by the representative of the Israeli regime. These allegations are part and parcel of a preplanned Zionist scam to break resistance to aggression and invasion in the region and deflect attention from the root causes for all tensions in the Middle East, namely, the Israeli regime's aggression, occupation and State terrorism. Undoubtedly, the State terrorism in the truest sense of the word has been on display by the criminal Israeli regime in the Middle East in the last six decades.

This regime, which has been perpetuating a never-ending practice of State terrorism, killing, war crimes, crimes against humanity and property destruction, has been deeply suffering from the lack of legitimacy from its very inception. Therefore, it is not surprising that the representatives of such a regime, ruled constantly by perpetrators of various crimes against humanity and war crimes, would make such baseless and fabricated propaganda as a remedy for the illegitimacy of that regime and in an attempt to draw the international community's attention away from its various crimes in the region.

Moreover, it has also become a patented practice of the Israeli regime to deliberately and constantly defy many international rules and regulations, not to mention hundreds of Security Council resolutions, in clear contempt for the international community and for the fundamental principles under which it operates.

In this context, particular reference should be made to the wicked and mischievous policies of the Israeli regime on the nuclear issue, which is a clear example of its dangerous and unabated pursuit of a nuclear arsenal during the past decade. Undoubtedly, the Israeli regime's clandestine nuclear weaponry coupled with its dangerous missile capability and its irresponsible policies and practices present a real threat to international peace and security, and also to the volatile region of the Middle East.

Therefore that regime should be kept under continuous pressure by the international community to abandon its terrorist acts and its nuclear programme and place all its nuclear facilities under international monitoring. Obviously, the Israeli regime is the single existing obstacle for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. This regime, which has been extensively assisted by the United States in its continuous clandestine operation of unsafeguarded nuclear facilities, has never been a party to the international instruments on weapons of massive destruction, namely, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It has also paid no attention to the constant international call in different forums, particularly in the 2000 NPT Review Conference, which called upon this regime by name to accede to the NPT immediately and without conditions.

My delegation also rejects the unfounded allegations raised against my country by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom in this Council today. It is unfortunate that that representative, whose Government shares the responsibility for the Israeli crimes because of its support to the Israeli regime in its State terrorism, failed to mention even one word or one sentence about the atrocities and the crimes of the Israeli regime and instead made baseless allegations against others.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): First, let me express my appreciation for the statements made by Syria and Iran. At a time when terror looms as the major threat to civilization as we know it, I am sure we all feel privileged to be lectured on terror by the two worst major experts on and practitioners of this craft.

It was also refreshing to hear the representative of Syria rewrite history and reality in conformity with his

usual practice. Syria, the host country to the Olympics of terror, cannot make a mockery of the Council by preaching peace in the morning and hosting, financing, perpetrating and practicing terror in the afternoon. The assassins of Damascus, still under investigation by the Council, cannot fool us by wearing the mask of peace-seekers, while hiding their real face of death and terror.

As for Iran — a fundamentalist, extreme and reactionary regime led by a ranting President who denies the Holocaust while preparing the next one and who openly calls for wiping a Member State of the United Nations off the map — it was surrealistic to hear its representative, a representative of that terrorist State that initiated the crisis in Lebanon through its hired killers, the Hizbollah, decry the fate of Lebanon, a country taken hostage by Iran and devastated by its actions. I thank the Iranian representative for demonstrating yet again to the Council in no uncertain terms why that dangerous regime must be stopped before it is too late.

The President: There are no other speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.55 p.m.

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